



Christian Community Action, Inc.

Testimony Submitted by Rev. Bonita Grubbs
Executive Director
Christian Community Action
To the CT General Assembly
Subcommittee on Human Services
Of the Appropriations Committee
February 27, 2015

Administrative Offices

168 Davenport Avenue
New Haven, CT 06519
Phone: (203) 777-7848
Fax: (203) 777-7923
Email: cca@ccahelping.org
www.ccahelping.org

Hillside Family Shelter

Davenport Site
166-168 Davenport Avenue
New Haven, CT 06519
Phone: (203) 777-7848
Fax: (203) 777-7923
Sylvan Site
124 Sylvan Avenue
Phone: (203) 777-7172
Fax: (203) 777-7174

Stepping Stone Transitional Housing Program

660 Winchester Avenue
New Haven, CT 06511
Phone: (203) 777-7167
Fax: (203) 777-7171

Advocacy and Education Project Mothers For Justice LifeWorks Center

660 Winchester Avenue
New Haven, CT 06511
Phone: (203) 777-6072
Fax: (203) 777-6039

A.R.I.S.E.I. Center

370 Davenport Avenue
New Haven, CT 06519
Phone: (203) 777-7840

*Offering
Help,
Housing
and
Hope*

Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. I appreciate being afforded the opportunity to share brief remarks in connection with proposals that will affect the people we serve at Christian Community Action.

Overall, my concern is about fairness, equity and justice for families that are poor and in need. The year's budget reflects the exact opposite: elimination of services for them and reductions in state funding for organizations and systems that serve them. I always hope that we in CT are better than this.

Drawing on the principles of the Better Choices Coalition, this budget does not include much, if anything, about incorporating revenue options that (1) invest in our economy, (2) eliminate unfair tax breaks that are either outdated or indefensible, and (3) ask more of those with the highest ability to pay. I believe that people in need will suffer more because of this omission.

Time does not allow me to indicate all of the areas in which this would be the case. Therefore, I will only mention two of them.

First, I have attempted to be a strong advocate, as a member of the Medical Assistance Program Oversight Council, of reducing the wait times for people attempting to receive needed services from the Department of Social Services' Benefits Center. For the last year, the average amount of time that people have had to wait to talk to someone has decreased from 1 hour, 25 minutes and 27 seconds in January 2014 to 60 minutes in January 2015. The effort is admirable – reducing the wait time by 48% - but it is still longer than necessary and acceptable for the people who desperately need medical and other services to have to wait that long.

Closing the Torrington DSS office and redirecting people to online and phone services can put more pressure on a system that is not providing efficient and effective services already. People who now call who do not have unlimited resources and cell phone minutes, I predict, experience more delays.

Approving this proposal will also undermine all of CT's good work as a national leader in implementing the ACA, and its increased Medicaid enrollment. It will also place limitations on developing strategies under consideration as a result of the successful State Innovation Model funding award that, among other things, will increase access and equity. It represents a one-step-forward-two-steps backward approach.

Second, Christian Community Action (CCA) received funding in this fiscal year to improve the quality of life for families that are homeless in New Haven. It has been targeted as one of many other social services cuts next fiscal year.

The funding's purpose is to offer solutions to them under the auspices of the Accessing Resources for independence Skill Building and Employment (ARISE) Center.

After receiving funding three months ago, my staff and I have been able to:

1. Meet with Mayor Harp about the Center and communicate with her staff to seek their support and counsel
2. Hire the first MSW to begin model development and implementation
3. Hire an Employment Services Specialist to assist heads of household within CCA's Hillside Family Shelter and Stepping Stone Transitional Housing Program
4. Secure a program site in which workshops, skill-building activities and employment supports will be offered
5. Finalize three partnerships – Cornell Scott Hill Health Center, Gateway Community College and New Haven Works – and meet with two potential partners – Yale New Hospital and Clifford Beers Clinic
6. Begin to work directly staff and families around the following outcomes:
 - a. 50 families served
 - b. At least 70% of those served through ARISE report that their income and employment has increased
 - c. At least 70% of those served in ARISE report that they have increased their skills and potential
7. Begin the development of Results Based Accountability (a system that CCA adopted for all of its social service and advocacy programs in 2011) performance measures related to employment, increased income and permanent housing.
8. Begin the implementation of a two generational model by seeking to hire a Child and Family Specialist within the next few weeks.

I see the ARISE Center, and its component parts, as a way to prevent families from becoming homeless and to support families so that they do not become homeless again. It is a community based strategy that has the capacity to be cutting edge, a comprehensive effort to draw attention to the plight of families – heads of household and their children –that will mean that they will be better off, less reliant on social services, more stable and financially secure.

By no means is this to line CCA's coffers. Rather, it is a way to address the longstanding, intractable and persistent homelessness of families in New Haven, something that the New Haven based 100 day challenge has yet to address.

I have provided additional information for your more detailed review and am honored to answer any questions you have. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony this evening.